

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0042

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 14805

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: CB

SUBJECT: CHENG HENG'S VIEWS OF KHMER GOVERNMENT CHANGES

1. FORMER KHMER CHIEF OF STATE CHENG HENG TELEPHONED EMBOFF TO TALK ABOUT RECENT CHANGES IN GKR. AFTER EMBOFF READ LIST OF MINISTERS, CHENG HENG SAID ONLY JUSTICE MINISTER WAS MEMBER OF HIS GROUP OF INDEPENDENTS. THE REST COULD BE CONSIDERED TO BE RESPONSIVE TO PRESIDENT LON NOL EITHER DIRECTLY OR THROUGH LONG BORET. HE COMMENTED THAT THIS WAS PERHAPS BEST SINCE THIS WOULD GIVE COMPLETE POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY TO LON NOL, HIS CABINET AND HIS ASSEMBLY.

2. CHENG HENG THOUGHT THAT IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE TO WORK OUT AN EXECUTIVE COUNCIL WITH GREATER PARTICIPATION BY MEMBERS OF SIRIK MATAK'S PARTY. SUCH AN EXECUTIVE COUNCIL WOULD ONLY SERVE TO IMPEDE EFFECTIVE ADMINISTRATION AND DIFFUSE RESPONSIBILITY. HE THOUGHT SIRIK MATAK WOULD NOT LONG ACCEPT SUCH AN ANOMALOUS SITUATION AND WONDERED WHETHER THE PROPOSAL WAS REALLY DESIGNED TO ELIMINATE THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL. HE HIMSELF WOULD APPROVE THE DISSOLUTION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL AND WOULD SO INFORM HIS SUPPORTERS. HE THOUGHT IT WOULD BE BETTER MERELY TO HAVE A VARIETY OF PERSONS DESIGNATED

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AS "NOTABLES" AND TO CONSULT THEM WHEN THEIR ADVICE WAS

NEEDED. THIS SITUATION WOULD PUT THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR GOVERNMENT SQUARELY ON LON NOL'S SHOULDERS.

3. CHENG HENG THOUGHT THAT THE SITUATION IN CAMBODIA WAS VERY DIFFERENT FROM THAT IN LAOS WHICH HAD A FRAMEWORK PERMITTING AN INTERNAL RESOLUTION WHICH OUTSIDE COUNTRIES COULD SUPPORT. CAMBODIA'S MONARCHICAL TRADITION WAS DIFFERENT, AND THE TWO PRINCES (SIHANOUK AND SIRIK MATAK) SERVED TO DIVIDE, NOT UNITE THE TWO POLITICAL FORCES. HENCE, CAMBODIA'S INTERNAL PROBLEMS HAD TO BE RESOLVED BY INTERCESSION FROM THE OUTSIDE. HE HOPED THE U.S. WOULD BE ABLE TO OVERCOME USSR AND PRC OPPOSITION TO A CAMBODIAN RESOLUTION.

4. CHENG HENG ASKED TO HAVE CONVEYED TO AMBASSADOR DEAN HIS ASSURANCES THAT HE WOULD PLAY A CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE. HE SAID HE WAS NOW READY TO RETURN TO PHNOM PENH AND TO HELP THE GKR TO SAVE HIS COUNTRY.

5. COMMENT: CHENG HENG WAS BITTEREST ABOUT SIRIK MATAK. HE SEEMED TO BE PREPARED TO SUPPORT LON NOL AND HIS GOVERNMENT, BUT THE IMPLICATION OF HIS DESIRE FOR THE PRESIDENT'S "FULL RESPONSIBILITY" APPEARED TO BE THAT IF GOVERNMENT WAS NOT SUCCESSFUL IN FINDING SOLUTION TO KHMER PROBLEM, LON NOL SHOULD LEAVE OFFICE. STONE

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